

EUSEBIUS AND THE SIEGE OF THESSALONICA

Jacoby, *FGrH* 101, comprises the only extant specimen of the historical writings of a certain Eusebius, who dealt with Roman affairs from Augustus to the death of Carus. Any document pertaining to the third century is guaranteed to be of interest, given the lack of sources for this grimly vital period. In particular, one that emanates from the pen of an historian almost certainly contemporary with the events he describes. Unfortunately, close inspection of the fragment reveals it as being in large measure little more than a *flosculus*, a literary pastiche owing more to Herodotus and Thucydides than to historical detail.

According to Evagrius (*HE* 5. 24), Eusebius covered the period from "Octavian, Trajan, and Marcus" up to the death of Carus. It is clear that the reference is not to Eusebius of Caesarea, for that worthy is cited earlier in the same section in a register of ecclesiastical historians.

Nothing else is known of Eusebius or his work¹). The phraseology of Evagrius suggests that the period up to Marcus Aurelius was dealt with in more cursory fashion than later events. Eusebius became more detailed as he approached his own time. He was not unique in that, of course; one thinks of Ammianus. The inference is supported by the fact that the extant fragment comes from Book Nine²). Its scale is such that Eusebius could not possibly have covered over two centuries of Roman history in this sort of detail in a mere seven volumes.

The assumption that Eusebius wrote soon after Carus because he did not include Carinus and Numerian is natural and reasonable, albeit not invulnerable to objection. Modern patterns of logic and thought must be resisted. The historians of late Rome and early Byzantium frequently produced detailed narratives between chronological termini that may seem capricious. It is sufficient to adduce Olympioidorus of Thebes (407–

1) There is a short notice in *PLRE* 1 (Cambridge, 1971), 301; the historian is excluded from *PIR*².

2) Assuming that the attribution in the *Excerpt. de Strat.* of Constantine Porphyrogenetus (the provenance of this fragment) is correct.

425), Priscus of Panium (433-74), and Malchus of Philadelphia (473-80). For all we know, Eusebius could have had a particular and partisan reason for rounding off his work with Carus. And there is always the chance that death supervened.

Nevertheless, the assumption remains attractive. Contemporary history was a popular genre in the second and third centuries³). Understandably; there were great victories and great disasters to recount in both. Familiar names such as Herodian need not be lingered over. The rash of *Parthica*, forever stigmatised by Lucian, will be recalled. Unsurprisingly noticeable are the biographical and panegyric strains. Thus Aelius Antipater on the deeds of Septimius Severus, or the shadowy Ephorus of Cumae, chronicler of Gallienus. Of greater interest is Nicostratus of Trapezus⁴), who composed an account of the years 244-60. This sort of specialised narrative foreshadows the fashion of the fifth and sixth centuries. It may or may not be signal that Nicostratus exactly fills the gap created by the lacuna (genuine or fabricated) in the *Historia Augusta*.

There was a vogue for the sort of narrative essayed by Eusebius. In particular, for the detailed account of a siege preserved in the surviving fragment. More on this genre in due course. It is patent that Eusebius himself was not present at the siege of Thessalonica. He thrice emphasises (*ἐνθρόμην, οὐκ ἤκονσα, ἔμαθον*) that he was in the position of seeking out information through enquiries. Hence, on this occasion at least, he was no Dexippus rallying Greek defenders against the barbarian.

Reference is made by way of illustration to the siege of a Gallic city and to the Gallic Empire. What this may imply about Eusebius is uncertain. I do not share Millar's⁵) "impression of places and events far away and of only marginal interest." True, there is a certain prolixity (not helped by the poor condition of the text at this point) in the geographical description which suggests that it was designed for Eastern readers. It need not, however, imply that Eusebius (as Dexippus apparently was) was concerned solely with the Greek East, thereby approaching a "Byzantine" viewpoint⁶). Within the context of the fragment,

3) For what follows, I am much indebted to F. Millar, "P. Herennius Dexippus: the Greek World and the third-century invasions," *JRS* 59 (1969), 12-29 (hereafter cited by author's name).

4) Jacoby, *FGrH* 98.

5) Millar, 24.

6) Millar, 26-7.

it is as well that the Gallic allusion was marginal; otherwise, Eusebius would be assailed for digression and irrelevance!

Furthermore, this supposed "Byzantine" viewpoint must not be exaggerated. The Greek historians of the fifth century did not minimise or exclude Western affairs. Olympiodorus' work was concentrated on the West, for obvious example. And such writers as Malchus of Philadelphia and Candidus the Isaurian included Western matters in their narratives⁷). It should also be observed that, if Evagrius' phraseology preserves the true title or picture of Eusebius' work, it is hard to see how Western affairs could be of only marginal interest for this historian.

Another assumption requires comment. Namely that Eusebius is describing the siege of Thessalonica under Valerian and Gallienus. This could well be the case, indeed probably is. That particular blockade did become something of a literary show-piece, a phenomenon best evidenced by Syncellus⁸) with his extravagant flourishes on the concomitant Greek stand at Thermopylae, fortification of the Isthmus, and what not. The siege in question also left an impression, through his sources, on Zonaras⁹).

However, there was at least one other siege of Thessalonica in the third century which permanently entered the record. It happened during the reign of Claudius. This event claims equal (and equally brief, at that) space with the earlier siege in the versions of the *Historia Augusta*¹⁰) and of Zosimus. One matter is worth mention. In his reference to the first siege (I. 29. 2), Zosimus obtrudes a tribute to the valour of the Thessalonians; his observance of the siege under Claudius (I. 43. 1) lays stress on the war machines employed. This latter theme dominates the extant Eusebian fragment. Zosimus might conceivably have drawn on accounts that used the siege under Claudius as an occasion for a set-piece on the machines. Yet this is a slender thread, for the first part of Eusebius' narrative (as we have it) is concerned with the courage of the Thessalonians, individual and collective.

Strictly speaking, it is uncertain which of the sieges is in

7) Emphasised by Photius, *Bibl.*, codd. 78-9.

8) Syncellus, p. 715 (Bonn).

9) Zonaras 12. 23.

10) *Gall.* 5. 6; *Claud.* 9. 8.

cause¹¹). For the balance of the present paper, that does not much matter. What has to be said about the literary aspects will obtain in either case. For analysis of the fragment betrays an alarming proportion of pastiche and literary recollections.

Eusebius employed the Ionic dialect. Which naturally evokes the name of Herodotus. His procedure is in contrast to that of Dexippus, who (in the eyes of Photius¹²), at least) affected a style all too redolent of Thucydides. Ionic endeavours were not, of course, unique to Eusebius. Arrian springs to mind; at least one of Lucian's victims tried to use the dialect¹³).

Or better, for pseudo-Ionic. Practitioners found the mode a difficult one to sustain. Arrian's efforts are pronounced a disaster by his editor, Chantraine; Lucian's butt could not maintain consistency¹⁴). Similarly, Eusebius falters from time to time, either relapsing into Attic or falling into hyper-Ionicism: ἀπηγήσιος for ἀπηγήσιος and μοίρη where he should have written μοίρα are flagrant examples.

Any historian in the third century who could write τὰ μάλιστα λόγον ἄξια καὶ ἀπηγήσιος ἐπιδόμην γενεσθαι τούτοις, ταῦτα σημαίνω is proclaiming a literary allegiance from the very rooftops. It is no surprise, then, to discover that at times the fragment is little more than a cento of Herodotean flourishes. The following items will demonstrate the contention¹⁵):

τὰ ἀρήια. *LSJ* give no example of this substantival use of the neuter plural; the epithet itself, however, is quite frequent in Herodotus (1. 55. 4; 23. 5; 6.98. 3; 8. 37, 2; 9. 33. 3).

ἀντιπόλεμοι. There is the complication of ἀντιπολέμοι here, but the word is in Herodotus 4. 134. 1; 4. 140. 3; 7. 236. 8; 8. 68. 1. *LSJ* give no other example.

θώματι ἐνέχεσθαι μυρίω. This combines Herodotus 2. 148. 6

11) Observe the chronological vagueness of Ammianus 31. 5. 16, in which a long siege of Thessalonica is mentioned.

12) *Bibl.*, cod. 82.

13) *De Hist. conscr.* 16. Others who employed Ionic were: Cephalion (Jacoby, *FGrH* 93), who produced a flagrantly imitative History in 9 books, each named after a Muse; Asinius Quadratus, geographer and Roman historian of the third century (Jacoby, *FGrH* 97); and the fourth-century scholar and imperial biographer, Praxagoras of Athens (Jacoby, *FGrH* 219).

14) See the Preface to Chantraine's edition of the *Indica* (Paris, 1952), 11-12, 16-19. For the whole question, cf. F. G. Allinson, "Pseudo-Ionicism in the Second Century A.D.," *AJP* 7 (1886), 203-17.

15) I rely largely on J. E. Powell's *Lexicon to Herodotus* (2nd edit., Hildesheim, 1966), for details of Herodotean usage.

(*θῶμα μυρίον παρείχοντο*) with the thrice-used *θῶμα ἐνέχεσθαι* (7. 128. 2; 8. 125. 3; 9. 37. 3).

ἀφηγήσιος. The failure to maintain the Ionic was noted above. Herodotus had the noun three times, always (as here) with *ἄξιος* or a compound thereof (2. 70. 1; 3. 125. 3; 5. 65. 5).

ἀντὶ τῆς ἄρδιος τῆς πρὸς τῷ ἄκρῳ τοῦ ὁιστοῦ. This is clearly inspired by the Herodotean *ἄρδιον ἑκαστον μίαν ἀπὸ τοῦ ὁιστοῦ* (4. 81. 4). The Eusebian passage may justify retention of the words *ἀπὸ τοῦ ὁιστοῦ*, usually bracketed by editors of Herodotus.

ἐλυτρα πλέα ὕδατος. Herodotus (4. 173) has *ἐλυτρα ὕδατων*.

Such are the most obvious reminiscences. However, Herodotus is not the only model. Thucydides is also exploited by Eusebius. Recognition of this helps with the text in one instance. In his technical section on flaming arrows and related devices, there occurs the phrase *κεραίας ἐπεκεκλημένας*. Jacoby obelised the verb: other readings are *ἐπεκκελημένας* or *ἀπεκβεβλημένας*. In fact, the true text can be certified by an appeal to Thucydides 2. 76. 4, where there is the phrase *κεραίων ἐπιεκκελημένων*. This was surely the model for Eusebius.

On general principles, it is risky to posit linguistic borrowings between authors. Verbal echoes can often be fortuitous. And two writers describing sieges can fairly be expected to exhibit some innocent similarities. However, the sheer scale of Herodoteanisms shown above, in a text extending over not more than two of Jacoby's pages, is utterly suspicious. Especially when usages from other sources are discernible¹⁶).

Descriptions of sieges almost amount to a genre in themselves. Even after making due allowance for the built-in distortion resulting from the fact that we only have many of these pieces from the *Excerpt. de Strat.* of Constantine Porphyrogenetus, this is beyond dispute. Dexippus specialised in them: we can read parts of his accounts of the sieges of Marcianopolis (fr. 25), Philippopolis (frs. 26–7), and Side (fr. 29).

Art and life were related. Such sieges did take place. They formed a real and stirring theme. Men such as Dexippus had a first-hand appreciation of fighting; for them, siege literature was more than empty rhetorical exercise. Yet the temptation to

16) For instance, *ἀναγιάζω* in the sense of "rescue" may have been taken from Plutarch, *Brutus* 16; *ἀκίς* denoting the barb of an arrow could be owed to the same source (*Demetrius* 20); *βέλεα πυρφόρα* is found in Diodorus Siculus 20. 48. 9.

embellish was often irresistible. Dexippus fell back on the siege of Plataea for some of his effects. More egregiously, Priscus of Panium flung together various phrases and effects for a confection on the siege of Naissus by the Huns. That deception has been unmasked elsewhere¹⁷).

The fragment of Eusebius is a literary *flosculus*, in large part. Not, it has been shown, in any way unique. He was conforming to the rules of the game. It does not mean that his account of the siege of Thessalonica is to be classified as fiction. But one has to be wary of the details, and careful not to draw sweeping inferences as to the technology of the barbarian invaders. The ancient reader, educated in the same tradition, was at once more alive to, and appreciative of, the rhetorical fashions. The due recollection of all this may help us understand how such phenomena as the *Historia Augusta* were possible. Not that the modern world should feel superior. For it is in our own time that blatant compounds of fact and fiction have been rendered respectable under the label "factoids"¹⁸).

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17) By E. A. Thompson, "Priscus of Panium, Fragment 1 b," *CQ* 39 (1945), 92-94.

18) By Norman Mailer, of course, in his "biography" of Marilyn Monroe. And, I (along with some reviewers) suspect, the technique recurs in such confections as Woodward and Bernstein's *The Final Days* (New York, 1976).